

The Good Shepherd

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[0:00] We turn again to John's Gospel, chapter 10, the Good Shepherd. Our Savior, when he taught the people, would use figures of speech, objects, practices with which they were familiar, and the people of Jesus' day were most familiar with the picture of a shepherd and his sheep.

And I guess that we too, in the islands, have got an advantage in that this is a familiar figure for us also, from their importance to the local economy, to the influence they have on driving on our roads, they are familiar.

And we're also very familiar with the ways in which people treat them, the fact of being either good or bad shepherds in relation to the flock. There are those that are regarded simply as sheep owners who are looking after sheep for the sake of the grants that are connected with them. And there are those who have a passionate connection with sheep, and the sheep in turn display trust and confidence in the shepherd as they mill around him, as the shepherd fills the trough with feed in the springtime.

So there's that connection, that human connection that Jesus is teaching in regard to him being a shepherd made with his culture and with our own.

There's also a spiritual context into which Jesus is speaking. The figure of a shepherd is used in the Old Testament in regard to those who had a responsibility to lead and to care for the people of God.

[1:59] And so in Ezekiel 34, the Lord chastises the spiritual shepherds of Ezekiel's day and says, you have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured.

You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

And so the shepherds, the priests, the kings, they had failed in their responsibility to shepherd the people. And the Lord, in response, says that he himself will come and he will shepherd them. I will rescue my flock. I myself will tend my sheep. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. And in the chapter preceding Jesus' words about being a shepherd, this has actually come to life in the treatment of the man who was born blind.

[3:12] The so-called leaders of this man, the Jews, the Pharisees, had paid little attention to him. They certainly could not have given him sight, but they did owe to him a duty of care.

They ought to have given him guidance. They ought to have given him encouragement. And instead of that, when the man refuses to respond to their words, they tie him up in abstruse arguments.

And eventually, they expel him from the synagogue. And it's Jesus, the good shepherd, who comes to him and who gives to him physical sight, but also comes and encourages him.

He seeks him out in his isolation and in his loneliness. He comes with compassion after his excommunication and shows not only physical care, but brings to him spiritual sight.

In a world that is lost, in a world which is oppressed by false leaders, the Lord Jesus Christ comes and offers himself as the true leader, the one who can be relied upon.

[4:31] I am the good shepherd, Jesus says. And as we consider these verses in John 10 this evening, I want us to think in terms of the call of the shepherd and then secondly, the credibility of the shepherd and then thirdly and briefly, the cross of the shepherd.

The call of the shepherd, the credibility of the shepherd and the cross of the shepherd. There are some memories which stick with you.

And I can remember quite clearly still one day in the summertime, being down in Glasgow and being in Central Station, Glasgow and just being impressed, almost overwhelmed, by the teeming mass of humanity.

People going hither and thither in different directions. Some treading purposefully to the train that they knew they had to get.

Others looking up anxiously at the board. Others seeming just to wander about aimlessly, passing the time, filling in the minutes. But all around, in different media, messages bombarding this great mass of humanity.

[5 : 53] Messages that were coming in neon or messages coming from the billboards. Messages which were being handed out in leaflets.

And in different ways, the messages were offering prizes of different kinds. They were offering information, beauty, success of different kinds.

One voice after another, calling out, Listen to me. I have what you need. I can give you direction. Heed my voice.

And I wondered, especially in regard to young people, how does one discern the voice that has your interest at heart? The voice that is not there simply to manipulate and destroy and tread you down, but the voice that will do you good.

How hard it is for young people, especially in our day, with all of the confusing messages about identity and purpose, to discern what is good and true.

[7 : 02] And Jesus comes and declares that he is the one who will give the guidance that we need. And his voice is the one that we need to hear.

Jesus speaks also of a sheepfold and of a gate to this sheepfold. And we're familiar again, are we not, with these kind of stone enclosures.

The back of our house in Linerco in Skye, there is a very substantial stone flank. I think it probably encloses about 20 acres of pasture.

And there is, as in the Jesus figure, one entrance to it, one entrance in which the sheep make their way. And Jesus speaks of a watchman who will watch over the entrance to the fold because there would be different flocks would be coming in and he is making sure that only those who are the rightful owners enter.

But there's always the possibility that a robber will come in and will avoid the gate and will come in over the wall itself and will seek to go off with sheep with which he has no right.

[8 : 23] So Jesus is speaking of two voices here in the parable. There is the voice of the robber whose intention is negative, is evil, who is there to exploit and to draw away.

And then there is his own voice. There's the voice of Jesus and there is the voice of the robber. We have robber personalities in all different kinds of walks of life, don't we? They occur in politics. There are those who simply are wooing you, not necessarily for your own interest, but because they want your vote. Salesmen who want your money. But most seriously of all, it can occur in the realm of religion.

All kinds of movements, different sects, different religious personalities, promising healing, promising wealth, or prestige.

[9 : 34] And like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, many of the individuals who set themselves up in the visible church are ultimately in it for their own good.

Sadly, many people in ministry positions are not there because they have had a genuine call to shepherd a flock, but are there because of an inner hunger.

There are issues in their lives that have never been resolved and as a consequence, they have an inner compulsion to lord it over other people.

They want a name. They want to influence the direction of people's lives and so be thought to be significant in their eyes, to be looked up to.

And in their hunger, they devour the flock, which is a terrible thing when you think of it. The shepherd's work there is to defend and to prosper his flock.

[10 : 48] And the false shepherd, or the robber, does the very opposite, devours the flock. Jesus warned against those who are inwardly hungry wolves, driven by an appetite for their own prestige, which results in the flock being hurt.

So there is this voice. There's the voice of the robber and then there is the voice of the good shepherd, the voice of Jesus. His sheep follow him because they know his voice.

What is the voice of Jesus saying to us? What is it calling us to? Well, it's a voice, first of all, that calls us to come under his leadership.

It doesn't take much of an acquaintance with sheep to realize that they have no organizational acumen. If you leave them to themselves, they'll scatter to the winds.

They'll generally make a mess of things. A shepherd is needed to come along with a note of authority to bring them under his rule, his direction, to send them to where they are supposed to be going by the proper route.

[12 : 14] And first of all, we stress that the voice of Jesus sounds out to call us under his leadership or under his lordship, we would say.

The gospel never is a declaration of some facts that we can be disinterested listeners to. It always calls for a response of obedience, of submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a summons to enlist.

It's a call to leave off going our own way, to abandon what is a determined impulse within us to be independent and to rule our own lives and to set our own direction and to submit instead to the direction of the good shepherd.

So the voice of Jesus is first of all a call to follow. He comes as the Lord who has a right over our lives.

[13 : 26] The new Christian is someone who has come under a new regime. He has given his allegiance to a new leader. And so the Lord himself, when he comes, Mark gives us the summary of his gospel.

Jesus came preaching the good news. The kingdom of God is near. Repent. Turn around and believe the good news. A summons to obedience.

Second, the voice of Jesus not only calls us to come under his leadership, but it calls us to new purpose. New purpose. Sheep need direction.

The shepherd gives them direction as he leads them out of the fold. Going back to this picture of the crowd milling around in the great train station or maybe the concourse of an airport.

And you look at and you wonder what is going on in the lives of all of these different people. And you wonder how many of them are actually inwardly aching for some purpose in their lives.

[14 : 37] They're following maybe a career path. Because that's what everybody else has done. Or they're chasing their own pleasures, their own desires, but it's ultimately satisfaction is eluding them and they're looking for purpose in their lives.

And Jesus calls us to a new direction. Jesus calls us and he claims that he will give us a new purpose to our lives. And so he comes to men who are fishing.

Peter, James, and John. and he says I will make you fishers in the truest sense. I will make you fishers of men. Jesus calls us to new purpose.

Jesus calls us thirdly to life in its fullness to the life that is ultimately the life that fulfills.

the life of the evil one, Satan, is a siren voice that will lure us onto the rocks which will be destructive. The thief has only self-interest at heart, never has the good of the sheep at heart, but Jesus comes and his desire is to enrich our lives, to bless us.

[15 : 54] maybe someone is here in church this evening and you're not yet a Christian and you're doing a wise thing, you're counting the cost.

Jesus always said that we should count the cost before following him. Jesus never made it possible to opt in via easy believism.

He challenged people to consider what it would cost. but we must never buy into the lie that the Christian life is a life in which we are robbed of the good that we may have.

That is Satan's lie. Satan from the very beginning accused God of being a killjoy, of being one who would withhold from Adam and Eve that which was for their own good.

And Satan consistently tries to deceive in that way. So don't let anybody tell you that if you become a Christian you will be the poorer for it.

[17 : 06] Jesus candidly tells us that we will have to take up our cross, that we will experience criticism, that there will be the abandonment of some fair-weather friends who no longer are interested in going with us when we follow Jesus.

but the ultimate reality is that Jesus is calling us to life in its fullness. I have come that we may have life and have it in all of its fullness, an abundant life, not simply scraping along until at the very end we slide into heaven, but a life of love of love and joy and peace.

These are the three essential ingredients of the Christian walk. Jesus has promised that we will have life with his great daily provisions.

Moreover, it's a life that we prove as Christians to be, a life which brings joy at every turn, in which there is an adventure in following the Lord Jesus.

Many of you here will testify to that fact, that following Jesus brings us into opportunities that we would never have dreamed would be possible, of meeting people from different cultures who have shared the same love for the Savior that we have, and we're knit together with a kindred spirit.

[18:39] How different it is from the fantasies that are chased by those who are listening to the robber's voice. Here many people say today, you can have it all.

You know, you can have the high-flying career, you can work 14 days and still have that flourishing marriage and family life. And usually the people who claim that you can have it all in that sense are miserable advertisements for the have-it-all lifestyle because they looked dried up, burned out.

But Jesus offers not a life made up of material things, but this life of love and joy and peace, of self-control, wisdom, gentleness, a consciousness in our hearts that God is real.

And moreover, he has a purpose for our lives. Our lives are not meaningless. They count for something. He promises that we may have mastery over the things that can potentially enslave us. Greed, envy, sexual immorality, alcoholism, lying. Jesus is offering to his sheep life in all its foods.

[20:08] I have come that they might have life abundantly. So the shepherd is calling in all of the myriad voices that call to us in different directions.

There's the voice of Jesus calling distinctively. how can we trust this voice? How do we know that Jesus is telling the truth?

This is a vital question again, especially at the threshold of believing as we consider the cost, as we think of whether we will go forward and be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Can he be trusted? Are his claims trustworthy? And Jesus himself tells us here why we can trust his claims. And first of all he tells us that he is the one who has come through the gate.

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.

[21:21] What Jesus is saying here is that there is an appointed way to enter the sheep fold and he has entered via the proper way. That's the case, isn't it, in life?

There's a proper way to come into church this evening. I don't think anybody came through a window or climbed under pews to get to their seat. There was a proper way and we entered via the proper way.

And the Old Testament scriptures had said that there would be a way by which the Messiah would come. they predicted where he would be born, to whom he would be born to, the unusual character of his birth, how he would appear to the nation, how he'd be introduced, where he would live, what he would say, what he would do when he came, the manner of his death, his resurrection.

This is what Jesus means. He came the predicted, the prophesied way. He's credentialed. No other person in all of the history of Israel ever came to the people of Israel this way.

This is how we can know that Jesus is the true shepherd and his words are to be trusted. He entered by the door. He was born in Bethlehem, prophesied by the prophet Micah.

[22:51] He was born of a virgin. Isaiah 7, 4, a virgin shall be with child. It was said his name would be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

He's the one who was presented in the temple as an infant, circumcised on the eighth day according to the law. He was owned by God at his baptism.

He came the accepted way. And on the other hand, false shepherds, those who come to manipulate and to prey upon the flock, they are recognized by their craftiness and their cunning.

There's a lack of openness in their dealings. They're not credentialed. One of the hallmarks of all Christian converse and dealings should be the openness with which we deal with one another. everything conducted in daylight. But the thief and the robber dwells in the shade and the darkness. Jesus came through the gate.

[24:02] His way was prophesied. And interestingly, Jesus says that he can be trusted because the watchman opens the gate for the good shepherd.

What does this mean? Probably this is referring to John the Baptist who was looking out for the coming of the Savior. John pointed to Jesus.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He's credentialed by John's testimony. And thirdly, he's known by the care he has for the sheep.

sheep. What a wonderful way of knowing that Jesus is all he says he is because he loves his sheep. And in Jesus' earthly ministry there is this tenderness towards all with whom he comes in contact.

He knows your name. he knows your personal circumstances all about you. In all of his dealings with people in his earthly ministry there is this personal loving nature.

[25 : 17] In his dealings with Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, the Roman centurion, the woman with the issue of blood, blood, Jesus knew their circumstances, dealt with them with tenderness, with gentleness, and he comes close to us.

The shepherd is the good shepherd and because the sheep trust him he comes close to them.

There is an intimacy in his dealings with us. And that is such a contrast with the way that people who try to big up their position deal with those.

In fact, by creating a distance from others they seek to make themselves seem more important in all kinds of different ways, in ways that we recognize sometimes as simply being normal.

The business desk that separates the interviewer from the person being interviewed. The way that the secretary shields her boss from others.

The military uniform that sets somebody off from the common rank. But Jesus is with his sheep. He goes ahead of them.

[26 : 32] He never abandons them. He never allows them to go through some circumstance which is darker or harder than any he has experienced himself.

And fourthly, we know Jesus can be trusted because of our experience of him, of his voice.

It rings true deep within us. Doctrinally, we would say that that is the Holy Spirit testifying in our hearts the truth of Jesus' words.

voice. And so we read the Bible and we're gripped by the Bible because Jesus speaks to us.

His voice comes to us through the word written. God's people, those he is calling by name, recognize in the words of the Old and the New Testament the authentic voice of Jesus.

[27 : 44] us. We know his voice. J.B. Phillips, who was the great New Testament translator, when he wrote his autobiography, he entitled it Rings of Truth after the way in which he had been repeatedly convinced by the truth of the New Testament as he worked closely with it.

It simply rang true deep within us. And friends, when we read our Bibles, when we come to be drawn by Jesus and we encounter him in his word, there's something that simply rings true deep within.

Holy Spirit applying the truthfulness of the word to us. And by the same token, Jesus' sheep learn to recognize the imposter.

They become discerning. man. So the experience in ministry often has been people will come and they will say, what do you think of this booklet, this leaflet?

There's something in it that seems a bit dodgy, doesn't seem quite right. That's a huge encouragement because it's saying that somebody has begun to discern the difference between the voice of the shepherd and the voice of the imposter, the one who was there to manipulate and to exploit.

[29 : 16] So Jesus is saying that he wants us to lead us into a new world in which there is a new life, a life that is marked by truth, by satisfaction, and he is the door, and he is the only door, the only way to this life in all its fullness is by Jesus.

Thirdly, and then very briefly, the cross of the shepherd. The shepherd shows that he is the good shepherd by his love to the very end.

Jesus is willing to lay down his life for his sheep, and he contrasts his own commitment to the sheep by the passing interest that the hired hand has.

The hired hand is paid for the hours he's with the sheep, but at the first whiff of trouble he's off, but Jesus lays down his life for his sheep.

And verses 17 and 18 stress the purposeful nature of Jesus' death. death. Jesus didn't die on the cross of Calvary because his mission had gone badly wrong.

[30 : 42] Jesus could never have secured salvation by an accidental death. His death wasn't an accident, it wasn't a tragedy, it was a purposeful laying down of his life for his sheep.

One commentator, Don Carson, writes, the shepherd does not die for his sheep to serve as an example, throwing himself off a cliff in a grotesque and futile display while bellowing, see how much I love you.

No, the assumption is that the sheep are in mortal danger, that in their defense the shepherd loses his life, that by his death they are saved, and that that alone is what makes him the good shepherd. I am the good shepherd, good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. What a wonderful, wonderful truth that is.

And it's a truth that the writers of the New Testament could never get over, that Jesus had loved them to the extent of laying down his life.

[31 : 53] And so we have these awestruck references in the pages of our New Testament to this. John writes in Revelation, unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

Paul in Romans, why we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Peter, he bore our sins in his own body on the tree.

The writer to the Hebrews, who through the eternal spirit, offered himself without spot unto God. He is the good shepherd.

He laid down his life for his sheep. Then we come to the end of Jesus' discourse, and we have a very familiar outcome. There is a division of opinion.

There are those who dismiss Jesus as being demon possessed, but others said, these are not the words of a man possessed by a demon.

[32 : 58] And the question we finish with is, what about you? What is your response to the voice of Jesus?

He is the good shepherd, and he calls us to himself, and he offers to us life in all its fullness, true life with meaning, filled with love and joy and purpose, love and the fellowship with the other members of his flock.

He will never leave us nor forsake us, but he calls us to enter by the gate. I am the gate, says Jesus.

Will you enter that gate this evening, if you have not done already, hearing the voice of Jesus, responding in faith, Lord, I believe, help me to overcome my unbelief.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this beautiful picture of our blessed Savior, this picture of the shepherd, at the same time strong and yet gentle, approachable, and yet majestic.

[34 : 22] Thank you that his voice speaks to us in the innermost parts of our soul. Lord, grant that by your Holy Spirit we may know with certainty that he is ours and we are his, for now and forever.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Psalm 67, Psalm 67, and we are singing from the Scottish Psalter, the second part of our psalm book.

Psalm 67, Psalm 67, Page 300, verses 1 to 7.

Lord, bless and pity us, shine on us with thy face, that the earth, thy way, and nations all may know thy saving grace.

The tune is Zurich, and we may stand and sing. Let the earth, thy way, and nations all may know thy saving grace.

[35 : 55] Let people praise thee, Lord. Let people all thee praise.

O let the nations be glad, and songs their voices raise.

Thou justly people judge, on our true nations all.

Let people praise thee, Lord. Let them praise thee, both great and small.

The earth, our fruit shall yield, our God shall blessings send.

[37 : 01] God shall as blessed men shall in fear, and to earth at most end.

Amen. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, rest upon you now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We had an incident during the service where our lady took unwell. She's come round.

She's talking. But we're just waiting on the ambulance to arrive to take her to the hospital. So if I could ask everyone downstairs to use the two side exits here and those upstairs to use the main door.

There may be an ambulance outside as you're going out. So just be aware of that. We will still go ahead with the fellowship. So if you are staying for the fellowship, just make your way through to the halls.

[38 : 02] If you're downstairs, you can just go out this door through to the hall. So just take your time and just be aware that there's things going on outside. Thank you. I should say myself and Ivor will just leave you to disperse.

We won't go to a door either. So just make your way out.